

A BLACK CIVILIZATION

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756 is a possible exception since he alone can exercise his magic; but here too the feeling is not so much of ownership as of having obtained his magical equipment by inherent ability combined with a mystic experience. In the west the magician's power can be passed from father to son, or to some extent from mother's brother to sister's son, and a man can acquire his magical rituals from others; but essentially the concept of magical power is much like our modern concept of talent and ability.

435 The governing principle in the evaluation of objects which will be kept permanently by their owner is the ease with which they can be transported by human carriage or dugout canoe. The amount of labor consumed in their manufacture contributes in some degree to their high value as individual property, and the relative scarcity of an object in nature or in trade also makes its contributions to Murngin economic values; but the final desideratum is the relative ease of transportation of the article, since this society has no domesticated beast of burden. Metal containers obtained in trade with white missionaries are extremely scarce and highly prized; yet if of very large size they will be given to someone remaining in camp or cut up and put to other uses.

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484 [492] The ultimate value is freedom of movement. Basically the largest factor contributing to this value is the shifting food supply which necessitates change of location; but the feeling for change of location permeates the whole society and has become the most positive motivating factor in the thinking of any Australian aborigine, including the Murngin. All the white ranchers and frontier settlers know and have to make allowance for the partially acculturated blacks' uncontrollable desire "to take a walk about," chiefly under the compulsion of movement from place to place but also because of love for homeland and native culture. The desire to go to other places is forever present in the mental constitution of a black's behavior. If he is in his own clan land where he was born and where he grew to maturity—the center of his cultural heritage—he still feels the urge to go to the next horde or food ground. A flexible material culture and a like technological equipment must, and do, form his adaptation to the natural environment.

(For further consideration of this economic problem, particularly from the point of view of the selection or rejection of exotic articles from other cultures, the reader should see Appendix I, Social Change in North Australia.)

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796 It might be argued that the factor of transportation did not prevent a luxuriant growth of ceremonial paraphernalia, such as totemic emblems, grave posts, ceremonial objects of dress, etc. Although the native